

Mr. James Gillingham, Bayport, Mich.

Interviewed by Wm. Wakeham and Richard Rathbun,

August 30, 1894.

The fishing in the bay is pound net fish-  
ing altogether now. There used to be sein-  
ing, but there is none now. The pickerel  
will not gill here. They tried it last  
spring, but they will not gill. There are  
but very few whitefish in the bay here, be-  
cause if there were we would be able to  
catch more than we do. There are a few hoop  
nets used around in the shoals up at the Mid-  
lands, as we call them. The Midlands are  
south of Stony Islands. They use them all  
through the shallow water, but mostly inside  
of the island where there is a narrow chan-  
nel of about 4 feet of water. They get most-  
ly perch in the fyke nets and get some pike,

P. entirely  
seining

Crabs

W. J.  
abundant

Fyke

Perch  
Eels  
Sunfish

a. g. m.

m. l. y.

m. s. c. h.

*Seines.*  
*Experiences.*  
*Hooks.*  
sunfish, etc. ~~The~~ seining was before my ~~time~~ <sup>time</sup> and I have never seen a seine drawn since I have been fishing. I have been fishing about 12 years. <sup>for</sup> Hook and line fishing has not been carried on for commercial purposes.

*Spearing.*  
*winter*  
*describ.*  
There is some spearing in the winter. But now they do not get heavy winters enough to get out much. There is a change in the winters now for about 10 or 11 years. The heavy winters are scattering now. We will get 3 or 4 light winters and then get a heavy one. These light winters we do not make over 6 inches of ice and they cannot get out much. Last winter there was not much over a foot of ice. They would spear for trout down below the Charities. They do very little spearing for trout in the winter, but they spear for pickerel. They get the large pickerel mostly, about like we catch

*trout*  
*walleye*



Wallage  
size

in the nets. We do not get very much small pickerel down here, but I guess they get smaller ones up the bay.

P.  
descrip.

We fish across the flat with our pound nets so that the outer pots would be in about 13 feet for our deepest net this spring, except in the channel where it was about 18 feet. We generally have from 4 to 6-inch leaders. The length of the leads is about 80 rods on an average. The pot is 30 feet square. The mesh in the heart is 4-inch, in the tunnel 3 to 4 inches and in the pot 2 1/2-inch. We do not use any of the whitefish pots. We fish for herring on all the grounds we fish, because that is all we get in the fall to amount to anything. Sometimes the fish gill some, but not a great deal. In the first place, there are more large fish than there are small ones of any other kind of fish and the larger mesh will

Herring pots  
arranged for

gilling

gill them worse. You take a small size mesh they cannot get their heads in to gill.

*P.  
Season*

I set the twine in the spring just as soon as the ice goes out. We calculate to get to driving generally about April 15, and get the twine in about May 10 or 15. Most of our spring herring come early and we do not get hardly any after May. We could get them earlier if we could get in earlier. It takes us about a month to get all our twine in. Last spring we set some twine early, but there was not much fishing, so we went on without driving. The pickerel come in from May 20 until about June 20 generally. *herring season)* They are a little later of late years. They last about a month. We do not get any very much later than the 4th of July. We calculate to pull out right after the 4th of July and do not set again until the 10th or 15th of September. We do not calculate to com-

*walleye season)*

P.

mence to set outside before the 20th of September. In the fall the fishing generally begins with perch, suckers, etc., for awhile. Last fall the first herring we caught was somewhere along in October. We get the herring then right up to the time we pull out. We generally begin pulling out about November 15, and calculate to get them all out by November 25.

We get the whitefish late in the fall generally. Do not get any in the spring to speak of, probably not over 300 or 400 pounds out of our whole rig. In the fall they commence to come on scattering about October 20 and then we get them right along, some days maybe get 100 pounds, and then may not get any again for quite awhile, and if we have a spell of rough, cold weather we get a few again. They generally follow the herring pretty close. The herring and white-

Fall season  
perch  
suckers  
herring

W.F.  
Season  
abundance

Mix with  
herring



P.

fish are generally mixed together. The whitefish are generally pretty fair size, from 3 to 5 pounds. We do not get very many small ones. We do not get hardly any in the shore rig. On the outside edge of the bar we get the most whitefish, in depths of 12 or 13 feet. They catch more across on the other side of the bay around Point Lookout and the Charities. The per cent. of whitefish to herring is very small, not over 1 per cent.

*abundance**Herring abundance*  
*Loc.*

We catch a great amount of herring here. The main herring fishing with us is on this flat out here. On the other side of the bay I guess there are pretty good herring fisheries.

*min. size*

We can market very small whitefish. Of course, we do not try to sell anything less than 1 pound dressed, but it is hard to tell what the market will take. I think about 1

*min. size*

*M. J.*  
*Walleys min. size*  
*abundance*  
*200.*

pound fish is as small as should go into the market, either pickerel or whitefish. Our whitefish for the last 8 or 9 years have not changed very much. We used to get more inside than we do now, but there has never been but very few whitefish caught here since I can remember. I hear the old fellows tell what great fishing there used to be here about war times. As far as the whitefish catch, it would be hard for me to tell just what it is, but I do not think it will go over 4,000 or 5,000 pounds a year in all our twine that I and my brother have.

*spawning*  
*herring spawning*

I have never seen any ripe spawn in the whitefish. I have seen the ripe spawn in herring. Generally very late in the fall the herring spawn. Some years we do not get the spawn at all. I think the whitefish spawn after the herring, for we never see any spawn that is ripe. I have never seen *front*

First  
walleye  
spawning

any ripe spawn in the trout. I have never <sup>walleye</sup> noticed any spawn in the pickerel and I have opened them quite a good many times. They must spawn before they get down this far.

walleye  
saugers

We do not get any pickerel to speak of early here. We get a few saugers. I do not think they come very early, but get them along with the pickerel. I have seen blue pickerel weighing 2 1/2 pounds. We get the blue pickerel with the other pickerel. We get the yellow pickerel in the spring principally. Generally they do not hang on very late, but this spring they hung on clear through, but we are not getting many now. They will average just about 1/2 pound apiece. Lots of them will weigh 1 pound.

perch

We can return perch to the water without any trouble. We do not hardly ever use anything less than 1/4 pound, and do not calculate to get anything smaller than that be-



cause they are not good in the market. A 4-ounce perch does not have to be very large. If you limit the size to 1/2 pound, you would not get very many perch. A 1 1/2 pound perch is a pretty fair size perch. They have always been sent to market, and the more you catch, the more you will catch. I guess they feed on small fish and probably other fishes eggs. They are the worst on small fish of anything I know of. They will tackle anything as big as they are themselves. I have used herring for decoys in the winter and they will come up and try to swallow a herring as big as they are themselves. They generally spawn about the first thing in the spring here. About the time the ice goes out is the time they are spawning.

*baso* The black bass are pretty scarce. We get a few at all seasons. Will get once in a

great while a scattering one. There is hardly any bass where we fish. The only place they can catch bass to amount to anything is in these bays inside. I do not suppose I catch 50 pounds a year on the bars outside where we are fishing.

Once in a great while I catch a white bass, but not to amount to anything. Once in awhile we catch rock bass.

We get the cat-fish here. We do not get many of the small cat-fish here.

We do not get many sturgeon. There were more sturgeon when I commenced than there are now. I can remember when there was lots of sturgeon. We will catch about 50 sturgeon in a year. They will weigh about 35 pounds dressed generally on an average, and we have got them weighing 80 pounds dressed. I have had quite a good many that weigh 135 or 140 pounds before they were dressed. When

*W. bass*

*Rock "*

*Cat.*

*Sturgeon*

there were lots of them here we used to get very large ones. I have seen them weigh 200 pounds. They all went in about one year when they went away. They used to come on the shoals and they seemed to leave all at once. About 13 years ago is the last spring we saw any around here to speak of. I believe I have seen more sturgeon in one day than would be caught in 5 years in this bay. This was before I was fishing. They used to come on the reefs, and would be perfectly thick with them, probably 50 acres or more, and inside of 2 years from that time there were not any to be seen on the shores. I do not know whether the sturgeon could be brought back or not. I do not know the cause of their leaving. Fish change, however. They will go to other places and then come back again. At Port Austin they catch more sturgeon than we do here, but they do



not catch as many fish generally. There is a fishery at Caseville that catches a pile of herring<sup>(?)</sup>. You can go any time you are a mind to and you will see them jumping all along that shore. I have seen as many as 20 jump out of water in sailing 5 or 6 miles 3 years ago this summer.

Sheepshead  
ling

We do not get many sheepshead, but do not sell them. We get a few lawyers, but do not sell them. The sheepshead, we used to catch lots of them. I have thrown over a ton to a lift, and where in the world did they go to? They were not caught off here. They kept dropping off, and the first thing we knew there were no sheepshead. I do not think we catch 200 pounds of sheepshead here in a summer now. We do not get many grass pike. Those we had to-day would weigh from 3 to 4 pounds apiece. That is about the average weight of what they catch around here. I do

Essex

*Maskinonge*

not know as I ever saw a maskinonge. I have seen what some call a maskinonge, but I should call them pike.

*trout*

We get a very small proportion of lake trout, not as much as white within one-half. We get pretty good size trout generally about 6 to 8 pounds, and we get them about the same time as we do whitefish. We get them towards the last of October, but do not get any in September. We do not get any whitefish or trout until the cold weather comes on. I do not know of any spawning grounds for them here. They get more trout down at the Charities.

*w. f. season**G. carp*

I have seen 2 or 3 German carp, and that is all. I do not think they would be much of any advantage to us, but they might be if there was a good market for them. As far as I know now, they would not go much better than the mullet here. We get a good many

*Suckers*

suckers, in the spring especially. We cannot handle them in the spring, but we handle what few we get now, but there is not much market for them.

*Menominee*

We get once in awhile a menominee here.

*Bluefin*

I do not know whether we get the blue fin or not, but there are quite a number of different kinds of herring we get here. There are larger kinds than what we get here generally that come mixed in with the common run.

*Herring  
var.**walleye*

I do not know where the wall-eyed pike spawn unless it is up at the mouth of the river. There are a good many suckers up the river in the winter. They do not take many pickerel up the river in the winter I know because they are very scarce in the winter.

*Suckers**walleye**min. size*

A 1 pound pickerel is small enough to take, but/I do not think there is much use of fooling with the perch. I think the perch are more damage to the fishing than all the rest

*perch*



put together. There are twice as many perch,  
twice as many herring and twice as many suck-  
ers as there was when I began fishing.

There is no market in the spring for perch  
or suckers to speak of. About 4 cents will  
be the average price for the pickerel to the  
fishermen, and the perch will not go over a  
cent, because most of the time they are not  
worth over a cent, and part of the time they  
are not worth anything. They are not worth  
a quarter what the yellow pickerel are.

They catch the pickerel up the bay before  
we do here, and there is a movement out of  
the bay in the early spring. I do not know  
how it would be to have a close season for  
pickerel, but there might be something in it.  
Of course, you go up there and those fellows  
would not like the idea of having a close  
season during the spawning time of the pick-  
erel, but it would be better for us, that is

*Herring  
abundance  
Suckers*

*walleye  
perch*

*walleye  
movements*

*close season*

*walleye  
throwing out*

certain. Turning loose the small fish would let the small ones grow and would not hurt anybody, but would be a benefit to everybody. It is not much of a job to turn them out of the nets alive. Years ago I have thrown over as high as 500 pounds a day of pickerel, about the last run in the spring. When the State Commissioner was here last fall, he asked me about the catch and I told him, and the year before he was in here when I brought in my last loads and they were No.2 fish. I had a load down there and they were about all No.2, and he thought I was putting it on pretty thick and he said I would like to see some of your bills when you are catching the most of your fish, along about June 20, and I showed him my bills then for a week, about 4,000, and only 60 or 80 pounds of No.2 fish.

*River  
mud  
perch  
suckers*

I guess they catch mostly perch and suck-

ers in the winter under the ice up the river.  
There were more suckers in the river last  
winter than there has ever been. We general-  
ly throw the small whitefish out.

w/ff  
throwing out  
"Dummy"  
w/ff  
other fish

You can dummy whitefish and they will  
live, as we have tried it. We used to dummy  
all our fish until about 8 years ago, and  
all the other fishermen around here dummy  
the whitefish now. This spring the fish  
died off in the water, the first spring here;  
all the pickerel, both large and small, died  
off. Some perch died off also toward the  
last. I do not know what it can be that  
caused it. They will die in one day in the  
net. They will die right in the open clear  
water because, if they were in over night,  
the next morning they would be right on  
their side. It is a little white spot on  
their gills, and those that were almost dead  
their gills seemed to be all rotten. You

mortality  
walleye  
perch

walleye



*"Dummy"*  
*W.F.*  
*Wullage.*  
*not burning*

can keep whitefish for 3 weeks in a dummy if *W.F.* you want to. We never had very many of them together, but we have had them where there were lots of pickerel, and they seemed to stand it better than the pickerel. With the herring there is nothing necessary to do except to catch them and salt them.

*offal*

We bury our offal. We never spread it on farm land. I suppose it would hurt the fishing to put it back in the water. I would not care about drinking the water after the offal was put in, whether it would hurt the fishing or not, and we drink this water right along. That is one reason for keeping it out.

*mill refuse*

I have heard a good many complain of the mill refuse. They claim that the sawdust, slabs, etc., drive the fish away. It does not get out our way to amount to anything.

*logs*

The rafts of logs do no harm with us, except

once in awhile a log will get loose and break through our twine. In the spring of every year we get a pile of red, dirty water from the river that comes down here until the water is not fit to use at all. It comes in streaks perhaps 2 or 3 miles wide.

Sometimes I think the fisheries here are as good as when we began fishing, although I do not think we catch quite as many fish as we did at first, but there is not much difference, and take the year around I guess there is no difference.

Our pound fish are whitefish, trout, pickerel, bass and pike. We put the pike in as No.1 pickerel. We do not catch but a very few pike. They go right in with the pickerel. The fish do not cost us any more to get than they used to. We used to run our fish to Bay City and it used to cost us a good deal to get them there. We used to run a

Dirty water  
from river

Fish  
abundance

P.  
catch  
up  
trout  
walleye  
bass  
Ears pike

Ears how and

Cost of fishing

marketing

Agan

tug and had to make a trip a day from here.

That is about 8 or 9 years ago. The picker-<sup>Figures</sup>

el are about the same in the spring, but there are not as many of them in the fall as formerly. I would say throw away all picker-el under 1 pound and whitefish the same. I would not kick if the limit of whitefish

were made 1 1/4 pounds. We have thrown away all small whitefish, and always have, for the reason that we have not caught but very few and we think they are scarce and maybe it will help the fishermen; that has always been my idea.

2 1/2 inches is just about the proper size for herring. There will not a very large herring go through that mesh, and some gill in a 2 1/2-inch mesh, especially when you corner them down. The mesh shrinks in tarring some. They gill some when the mesh is first put in now. The nets shrink about

valley  
abundance  
season

min. size  
valley  
N.B.

Throwing out  
Small w.f.

P.  
proper mesh  
herring

gilling

shrinkage

P. mesh  
fish



1/8 inch, or perhaps 1/4. They are a little over 2 1/2 when they are made. I think it would gill more if it was 2 1/2 after it was shrunk. I do not think it will make it any better to increase the mesh at all. Take it up around Detour, they have lots of little whitefish and it would not pay to have such fine mesh. We do not see hardly ever any whitefish that it would take 3 or 4 to make 1 pound. A man could not fish in the fall here at all with a larger mesh, but in the spring we could catch pickerel with a larger size. I do not think anything larger than a 2 pound pickerel would go through a 3 1/2-inch mesh. A 1 pound pickerel will gill in a 3-inch mesh.

In the fall we set principally for the herring. A man could not fish for what hard fish there are here now. I have seen small whitefish brought in to Bay City that had

Detour  
mesh out,

up,  
Sj

P.  
mesh  
herring  
walleye  
(mesh)

P. full  
herring,  
herringfish

"Dummy"  
n.f.

F. gen

nt

been held in dummies for a week or 10 days  
and they were alive, from Point Lookout. I  
have always been in favor of throwing away  
these small pickerel, and I think, besides  
making a better size fish, there would be a  
good deal better market. You can take it  
late in the fall when the little herring  
come around the fish house, I have seen it  
for acres perfectly black with them; they  
are little herring about 2 inches long, and  
they come in the last thing in the fall.  
They come right up in shallow water, so that,  
when the water goes down, it will leave thou-  
sands and thousands of them right on the  
beach to die. I have seen little whitefish  
in the water outside, but I never saw them  
near the shores and never saw them in warm  
water. I have seen them under the ice in  
the winter. Those little fellows do not mix  
with the herring at all. With the herring

wallage  
Throwing out  
Small.

Small herring  
abundant  
fall

Small w.f.  
distill

do not mix  
with herring

*herring  
with  
walleye  
association*

there are a few whitefish mixed and a few pickerel mixed with them; generally, when we are getting the most of our herring, we will get 150 or 200 pounds mixed in with them.

We hardly ever get many of 2 kinds mixed together, however. When one kind is abundant on the shore, there is no other kind that is abundant also, unless it is perch and herring. The scale trash goes together more than anything else.

*Perch  
season*

*walleye  
season*

*not mixed*

Generally, when the perch come on, they *Figur* come on early and then they drop off and then we get a run of pickerel along about May 20, and from that time to June 20 we get pickerel and get nothing but pickerel when their run comes. I have seen the time we could ship a whole boat load of pickerel off and there would not be a dip net full of other kinds among them. The pickerel eat herring to a great extent, and all the herring we

*good*



get then is what might be spewed up in the pounds by the pickerel. The herring run comes on first, and then following that is the pickerel. In the spring we do not get over 100 packages of herring sometimes. The pickerel is the principal spring fishery and the herring the principal fall fishery, and we set in the same places for both. It saves driving a new set of stakes, and we find there is no other place better than our own grounds. The herring are better fishing out away from the shore towards the channel, but the pickerel it is a hard thing to tell much about it because they come in streaks, and the same nets will be just the same year after year.

It is within 6 or 7 years that the water has dropped. About 8 years ago was the highest water I have ever seen. I think it was about 3 feet higher than it is now.

Fall run  
herring  
walleys

Herring  
walleys  
Seasons  
abundance  
Loc.  
P.

Summer out  
photo.

Level of  
water

